



## **PRESS RELEASE**

Oslo, 22 March 2010

### **Europe's Forests – a Source of Freshwater**

***FOREST EUROPE: Working together to help preserve valuable water resources***

**Good quality fresh water is one of our most precious and increasingly scarce global resources. On the occasion of today's celebration of World Water Day, FOREST EUROPE, the European ministerial policy process for the sustainable management of the continent's forests, underlines that healthy forests are vital for maintaining quality of water.**

Scientific experts have established that healthy forests are necessary for preserving the world's water. FOREST EUROPE's policy decisions and instruments make a significant contribution to ensuring that Europe's forests are well managed and thus help to preserve the planet's water resources.

Research underlines that both the availability and quality of water are strongly influenced by forests. Forests stabilise soil and minimise erosion. They trap sediments and pollutants from higher lying land uses and help to protect lakes, water courses and rivers. Forests also influence both the timing and the amount of water available by intercepting precipitation, evaporating moisture from foliage, transpiring soil moisture, capturing fog water and maintaining soil infiltration.

#### **Climate change and its effects on forests and water**

Climate change and ever increasing extremes of weather are now very much on the international agenda. Climate models from the International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) predict a significant decrease in rainfall in the Mediterranean basin while Central and Northern Europe can expect more rainfall during the winters. These in turn can result in landslides, flooding and droughts, phenomena that can be alleviated by sustainable forest management.

Research results demonstrate that proper maintenance and the restoration of damaged and degraded forest ecosystems can play a protective role and cushion the effects of climate change. Water protection is therefore a high-priority issue of the ongoing FOREST EUROPE work.

#### **Increasingly important role for FOREST EUROPE**

Ten percent of the forests in FOREST EUROPE member countries are designated for the protection of soil and water. However, forests are increasingly threatened by climate change and its potential consequences. The role and activities of FOREST EUROPE are therefore increasingly important. The pan-European policy process identifies issues and encourages the introduction and practice of measures designed to protect and safeguard the continent's forests - including zoning and restriction on certain management practices. Some European countries, among them Switzerland and Austria, have come far in integrating forest and water resources management to secure water quality and availability.

## **Warsaw Resolution links the protection of forest resources and water**

FOREST EUROPE's Resolution on Forests and Water, which was adopted at the 5th Ministerial Conference on the Protection of Forests in Europe in 2007, recognised the indisputable link between the protection of forest resources and water. Ministers committed to maintaining and enhancing the protective functions of forests for water and soil, which in turn helps to alleviate local water-related natural disasters. They agreed on the need to develop, improve and coordinate policies for forest and water resources management - especially as regards to climate change. This process has been further underlined through specific FOREST EUROPE activities to address coordinating policies for forest and water resources and enhancing cooperation between the forest and water sectors at national level.

On the pan-European level, FOREST EUROPE cooperates with the UNECE Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes (UNECE Water Convention) and the FAO, as well as scientific partners, to facilitate implementation of the political commitments and to develop the issue further through appropriate actions.

### **Future challenges**

The fact that forests play a crucial role in safe water supply should be taken into account when developing policies or water management plans. Many water and forest authorities both nationally and internationally can effectively work together to benefit both forest and water sectors. Strategies for different uses of water must be formulated according to the needs and priorities of local populations.

In recognition of the importance of both sustainable forest management on the continent and its vital link with the world's water resources, FOREST EUROPE works continuously towards a better cross-border understanding and policy structure regarding these issues. The 6th Ministerial Conference on the Protection of Forests in Europe will be held in Oslo in June 2011, and is expected to target issues of importance also for the relationship between forests and water.

### **Background information:**

#### **FOREST EUROPE – The Ministerial Conference on the Protection of Forests in Europe**

FOREST EUROPE is the pan-European policy process for the sustainable management of the continent's forests. It develops common strategies for its 46 member countries and the European Union on how to protect and sustainably manage forests. Founded in 1990, the continuous co-operation of FOREST EUROPE has led to achievements such as the guidelines and criteria for sustainable forest management.

High-priority topics of FOREST EUROPE are to strengthen the role of forests in mitigating climate change, to secure the supply of good-quality fresh water, enhance and preserve forest biodiversity and provide forest products. These are highly topical issues on the political agenda in Europe. Other important tasks are to develop a framework for future forest collaboration and to prepare options for decision by ministers on a possible legally binding agreement on forests in Europe. Norway currently holds the chairmanship of FOREST EUROPE and will convene the next ministerial conference in June 2011.

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